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ROUNDTABLE ON NIGERIA:

Recommendations for the CMAG meeting (London)

Roundtable on Nigeria
February 10, 1997
Summary of Recommendations

The Roundtable on Nigeria was held as a result of Minister Axworthy and Minister Stewart's request for consultation with Commonwealth NGOs in preparation for the CMAG meetings in London on February 17, 1997.

Several of the NGOs, including the Journalists Association, the Lawyers Association, the Human Rights Initiative, the Trades Union Council, the Royal Society and Judicial Education were represented along with departmental officials and ministerial staff. The Roundtable was chaired by Steve Lee, Director of the CCFPD. Both Ministers were also present.

The NGOs were asked to present their views and assessment of Canadian government's policy and the situation in Nigeria. They were also asked to address the capacity and the role civil society in both countries could play in helping the Nigerian people restore the rule of law.

In general, the NGOs agreed with the government's policy on Nigeria. They suggested however, that the government take a proactive approach by supporting Canadian NGO activities which enable communication between the civil societies and which could result eventually in putting an end to the human rights violations.

To this end several policy options were identified; that,

as currently two parallel courts have been set up, one judicial and one military, the Canadian government consider supporting the CBA and the CLA in establishing links with the judiciary in Nigeria. This would assist the judiciary in both countries exchange information and expertise, and assist the Nigerian judiciary in their efforts to return the country to civil law,

the government consider asking Desmond Tutu, who led the last fact-finding mission to the prisons in Nigeria, to conduct a sermon at the St. Giles Cathedral on the Sunday prior to the New Edinburgh meetings, and,

that the Canadian government consider persuading the CMAG members to request a second tour of the prisons in Nigeria.

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In addition, that,

as suggested by the CLA which is willing to be actively involved in the process, the Canadian government consider negotiating the potential for hi-level mediation between Shell Oil and the Nigerian government. Shell may be persuaded to offer economic opportunities and to help reverse the environmental degradation in the country. This could be offered in return for several demands including fair trials for detainees and an amelioration of conditions in the prisons,

the Canadian government participate in the CLA meetings at the end of May 1997 in an effort to explore ways in which the Canadian judiciary can better work with their counterparts around the world and in Nigeria in an effort to help resolve the judicial situation,

the Canadian government support the request of the Nigerian judiciary for impartial international observers at the upcoming Ogoni trials of the remaining group of 18 detainees. This would be done by assisting those who have volunteered to attend by facilitating the issuing of visas etc.,

the Canadian government consider issuing a minority report if a consensus is not reached at the New Edinburgh meetings, notwithstanding the polarization between Canada and the rest of the Commonwealth countries and the cultural sensitivities surrounding the discussions,

the Canadian government support the creation of a web-site for several reasons, including fostering linkages between groups involved in and interested in Nigeria in an attempt to collaborate and coordinate activities, countering disinformation by the Nigerian government, keeping the issue on the front page, and engaging Canadian youth,

the Canadian government support the work being done by the Canadian and the Nigerian judiciary by facilitating the supply of lap-tops to enable Nigerian lawyers to get on-line legal advice in general, and especially during trials.

In turn, the Commonwealth NGOs committed themselves to greater communication and coordination amongst themselves in order to be more effective, networking with Nigerian civil society through their own associations and encouraging training programs and student exchanges in fields that Canadian expertise is recognized e.g. constitutional issues, public legal education, sensitivity training, fact-finding and judicial ethics. As well, the NGOs committed to actively engaging other Commonwealth countries civil societies in continual and regular dialogue.

ROUNDTABLE ON NIGERIA
FEBRUARY 10, 1997

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